

Concert review - In Banda Magda's world, the answer is "yes"

By: Tad Dickens
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It feels like Magda Giannikou never lost her childhood. Certainly, she displays a sense of wonder at the world, and music, through her performances.

Giannikou, the Greek-born musician, singer and composer, brought her Banda Magda to Roanoke this week with several missions. Among them, a couple of performances on Jefferson Center's Shaftman Performance Hall stage with about 100 jazz and string students from William Fleming and Patrick Henry high schools.

After a series of rehearsals over the past couple of months, the students — or as Giannikou dubbed them, young musicians — played a Friday morning show for some Roanoke city schools students, and a Saturday matinee for the public.

The Saturday show featured a multi-part number called "Pacifiko," commissioned by Jefferson Center. It showed Giannikou's intense compositional skills, in service of musical beauty, with parts the young musicians were able to nail. Very lush, and an imaginative reflection on self-discovery and open-mindedness. Giannikou dedicated it to Roanoke schools Superintendent Rita Bishop.

About 350 came out for a show that lasted about an hour. They got something special. It wasn't a bunch of kids sawing and blowing a mess, but a cream-of-the-system set of musicians with great tone and time, along with four of their teachers, and the Banda Magda septet, Giannikou up front, charming the crowd.

It was full of childlike fun. The show started with percussionist Keita Ogawa making noises that included squeezing some rubber, honking pigs, before Giannikou pranced onstage with a pig of her own, squeezing it in a call-and-response that introduced "Sabia."

She brought up about eight audience members, children and adults, to help depict a story about partying antelopes vs. a dreadful tiger for a song called "Tigre Malin." She kept the crowd involved with sing-alongs and clap alongs, always reminding the audience: "If I ask you if you want to sing along, the answer is 'yes.'"

And she got outstanding performances out of the young musicians. Maybe the horn players could have been given more to do, though they performed well on "Agua" and show-closing "Trata." It's a minor complaint, and doesn't outweigh my thoughts on the gorgeous string arrangements and their execution.

One hopes these young players will carry forward the same sense of awe about creation and performance that seems to fuel Giannikou.

She and Banda Magda still had more to do as I saved this to publish. The act has two shows at the venue's rehearsal hall tonight. The first is sold out. About 10 tickets remained for the 9 p.m. show. I have to review Old Dominion at Berglund Performing Arts Theatre, or I would be there.

Source: https://www.roanoke.com/arts_and_entertainment/music/concert-review---in-banda-magda-s-world-the/article_5a257c60-f624-11e6-a06c-171f8727163f.html